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Stéphane Gros, *La Part manquante: Échanges et pouvoirs chez les Drung du Yunnan* (The missing share: Exchange and power among the Drung of Yunnan),

Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie, 2012, 588 pp.

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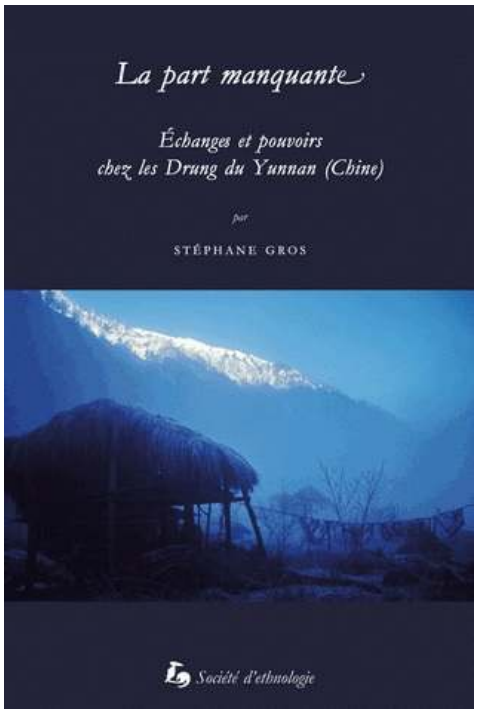
1 The Drung, or Dulong, are a social group of a few thousand people living mainly in the Dulong River valley of Southwest China at the frontiers of Myanmar and Tibet. There are still a few elderly Drung women alive today whose faces were tattooed when they were girls, and for the Chinese, photographs of these tattoos have come to symbolise the "savage" and "exotic" (p. 42) character of the remote borderlands of Yunnan Province. Until the 1960s, the valley did not have a road connecting it to the outside world, and even nowadays, it is sometimes cut off for several months of the year due to snow; anthropologist Stéphane Gros was once stuck in the valley during one of these snow-ins. He has been conducting research in the region since 1998, and brings an impressive depth of ethnographic, linguistic, and historical work to *La Part manquante: Échanges et pouvoirs chez*



les Drung du Yunnan (The missing share: Exchange and power among the Drung of Yunnan), his monograph on the Drung people.

2 The Chinese state recognises 56 *minzu*, or "nationalities," of which the Drung are one of the smallest. As such they enjoy political recognition, even as they continue to be viewed as poor and backward by their more powerful neighbours. The idea of *minzu* originated in Stalin's Russia and migrated to Communist China, where it took on a life of its own as a foundation of the state system for overseeing frontier peoples. Anthropological studies of ethnic minorities in China have deconstructed the state's categories to expose the epistemological process at work in identity politics,[1] suggesting that the nationalities rarely match the social identities of the people classed within them. This entails tremendous political effort to produce ideological cohesion – to make the nationalities work for the nation.[2]

3 If this approach sees nationalities such as the Drung as products of the state, then by contrast the Zomia theory that has gained ground in recent years would see them as inhabitants of a "stateless" space – making their mountain villages a site of refuge and resistance amid the network of highlands that criss-cross Southeast Asia.[3]

4 Between these two theoretical orientations, Gros traces his own path. "It would be profitable to see the Drung not only as victims or as fugitives," he tells us, "but also as actors within an encompassing hierarchical system" that partially but not wholly defines them (p. 29). Thus, his approach favours Drung agency against the backdrop of broader socio-political processes.

5 In the first two chapters, *La Part manquante* examines the interplay of local and national politics of identity. This is a complex opening to the book, as it explores the place of the Drung in Chinese ethnology as well as indigenous systems of nomenclature and the language-based identities of ethnic minorities inhabiting northwest Yunnan and adjacent parts of Myanmar. Among these minorities, the Drung are an interesting case study because their revolutionary history within China hinged on being recognised as "primitive communists" who could make a "direct transition" to Communism (p. 99). Gros notes that "Identification delimits spaces, properties, and immutable essences; it produces identity" (p. 79). The Communist ethnological process identified and thus transformed the Drung from "pygmies, slaves, and tattooed [people]" (the title of Chapter One) into socialist subjects. Through oral history, Gros shows us that the Drung actively inscribed their participation in this process.

6 Chapters Three and Four explore the history of Drung relations with neighbouring social groups, and their role in the ethno-politics of northwest Yunnan. Beyond the direct oversight of the Chinese empire, Tibetan and Naxi chiefs dominated the area until the first half of the twentieth century. Gros draws the reader's attention to the interdependence of ethnic groups in a zone where multiple systems of value, domination, and exchange met and overlapped. People as well as goods were bought and sold in these highlands, and Gros convincingly demonstrates the importance of slavery in the region's social history. The Drung were especially vulnerable to enslavement by more powerful groups because of their marginality. Yet rather than regarding the Dulong River valley as a margin of other, more important spaces, Gros suggests that we view it instead as a "corridor" where the frontiers of ethnicity, politics, culture, and exchange were continually reconfigured.

7 Chapter Five delves into the history of Drung women's facial tattoos. Here, Drung social history meets Chinese political history. Tattooing inscribed Drung women as nubile and reproduced the fertility of the group. Under Maoism, the practice was derided as a form of oppression, and it eventually ceased altogether. Yet it has become the emblematic image of the Drung in China.

8 Chapters Six and Seven examine Drung kinship terminology, marriage practices, and concepts of territorial belonging. Clan and territory create networks of alliance that are now shifting alongside Drung patterns of residence, partly in response to Chinese state policies. Chapter Eight analyses the social significance of Drung longhouses, which articulate notions of masculine and feminine complementarity. Finally, Chapter Nine examines the logic of social reproduction, centred on the circulation of substances, the importance of sharing, and the notion of a fundamental debt. The "missing share" of the book's title alludes to Drung myths in which people do not receive their fair share in ritual distributions of wealth or food and are therefore in a perpetual state of lack. In one such myth, the unequal distribution of goods disempowers the Drung people as a whole and renders them economically and politically weak.

9 Through the idea of the "missing share," Gros links the Drung system of value, with its emphasis on egalitarian distribution, to the position of the Drung in broader regional systems of exchange. The Drung believe power is always beyond their grasp. Once in a position of weakness vis-à-vis Tibetan and Naxi chiefs, they now see themselves as the weaker party in relation to the Chinese state. However, they have parlayed this position into new forms of exchange, becoming the recipients of long-term government aid.

10 The twentieth century was a time of swift and sometimes brutal social transformation for the Drung, as it was for the rest of China. In this context, *La Part manquante* accomplishes a delicate balancing act, furnishing the reader with rich ethnographic detail about the cultural history of the Drung without creating the illusion of an intact, unbroken tradition. The author's approach favours the agency of the Drung while showing that they define themselves through disempowerment. It is a valuable ethnographic and historical record of a people undergoing rapid change.

NOTES

1. Dru Gladney, Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1991; Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004; Ralph Litzinger, Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2000; Louisa Schein, Minority Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2000.

2. Thomas Mullaney, Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011 (Foreword by Benedict Anderson).

3. Willem Van Schendel, "Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: Jumping scale in Southeast Asia," Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, No. 20, 2001, pp. 647-668; James C. Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009.

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